

Salmon Bay School Community
Security Conversation with Neil and Darren
March 2, 2018, 9:30am to 10:30am

The following notes were edited for clarity.

Neil Gerrans: FOSB and Administration sent a message this week to respond to recent security concerns and this gathering is a way of extending that conversation. This has been on a lot of people's minds, and often is after events that happen on the national stage.

Facilities-Related Questions

Question: For children in Emily's room, they are very close to the outside door. Are you considering locking that door during the day?

Answer: Not at this time. There are students coming and going from recess and PE all day, some of whom get injured or need to use the restroom and need to get into the building without going on the public sidewalks. Locking the back doors prevents students from moving into the building without going into public areas and doesn't allow for independent movement without a teacher or other staff.

The plan is to continue with a single point of entry, the front door of the school. The back door would still be open, but gates on either side of the sidewalk easement and other gates could be locked.

Question: Could we have someone in that area? Could we have cameras?

Answer: Someone can hop the fence and if they are intent on doing harm, they can. Recess happens outside, PE outside. It's hard to harden our campus to be 100% preventative and it can be counter to our community-building goals and our philosophy. Salmon Bay administrators reviewed the last 200 shootings and found that most are done by people that belonged on the campus in some way. The random attack is very rare. These attacks are usually perpetrated by someone who knows the schedule and patterns. And that's a hard thing to have prevention for.

We realize that people come through the playground midday, contrary to our policy. The lack of parking by the front door makes it difficult to always use that entrance. Parents and families can help remind the community to use the front entrance to increase security and make it more of an exception for people to cut through the playground.

Question: How do the doors lock? Is it a button or is it manually?

Answer: Manually with 4 different keys, some lock inside, some outside. It's not a modern building.

Question: Could we make the window views easier to close? It can take a long time to close curtains in some rooms.

Answer: Neil and Darren have tested some options specifically for Emily's room. The blind systems work well. The current curtains seem to be state of the art. Additional blinds will be purchased for every classroom door window, based on funds raised at the 2018 Salmon Bay Auction.

Question: It seems like an obvious that we could start with changing the way our doors lock on the first floor. Could we ask for some funding for doors lock they could simply lock without having more keys?

Answer: It would cost at least \$10-20K per portal, and we have 9 portals. And, it's probably more than that, and they are planning to rebuild the campus entirely. There is a work session of the school board 3/28 to consider plans for the upcoming BEX Levy. The higher district priorities in the past several years were the sprinkler system and earthquake retrofit – that probably cost \$2 million. 1 in 100,000 schools in the country have a shooting. The minute a school shooting happens, a million marketers are sending me emails—we can spend a lot of money. And we've chosen to invest more in programming because sometimes it seems like a placebo. It makes us feel better, but may not make us safer. Sandy Hook and Parkland had cameras, buzzers, security and modern building. I don't think it actually makes us safer to have locks. It's a community decision about what we decide to spend money on, but we'd prefer to spend money on academics and programming.

Question: What is it that you are willing to implement and what do you need? How can we help?

Answers

Darren Frink, Assistant Principal: We need community involvement and encouragement. The more that we harden the building the more we let our guard down. I'd rather be on the radio and always walking and keyed-in and observing. I think that's a better tactic. I've been in community schools for over 15 years. As a parent, I don't want to give up that community feel to have a hardened building. I think the community keeps kids safe.

Neil Garrens: There's a few things that are easy and we should do. We have about 10-12 best radios that work well. Cell phones don't always work, although the system is set up. These radios work well and I'd like to get a few more radios, perhaps 6 radios at about \$250 each. We'd like to buy shades to remove lines of sight. Generally, I want to see in the classroom most of the time. Blinds make it possible to remove visual access in emergencies, while keeping them up day-to-day. **Note: Salmon Bay families supported the request for radios and shades at the 2018 Salmon Bay Auction. These are in process of purchase and installation.**

I would love doors that lock but I'm willing to wait a few years, which is about how long it may take to get clarity on our school rebuilding timeline. About 20 schools have redevelopment plans and the district will likely rebuild about 16 in the next three years. We are one of the older schools. We are likely to be on the next funding cycle (resources are called the BEX Levy). The School Board makes the decision and Salmon Bay will let families know when that decision is happening.

Drills and Lockdown questions

Question: How often do lockdowns happen? How should we communicate with our kids?

Answer: There are 8-10 safety drills each year, about one per month. There are several different types of drills. The school implements 3 fire drills, 2 lockdown drills, 2 shelter-in-place drills, 1 earthquake drill, following district protocol for each type of drill. The shelter-in-place procedure is designed for external events like a bank robbery or large lightning storm. In these situations, school continues but outdoor areas are not used. A lockdown procedure happens if there is an active risk currently happening. For drills, teachers say that we practice in case there is something we need to deal with. We wrestle with what we tell our youngest students.

Question: During a lockdown, what happens?

Answer: During an actual lockdown, Salmon Bay has detailed procedures that staff and teachers follow. Teachers and principals have done active shooting training.

The school focuses on students first and communication with parents, second. We tell middle schoolers to tell parents that they are safe-text that we are fine. For younger people we use school messenger to send emergency text or call and can do that quickly. If there is someone in the building, we are focused on stopping that first. Fire and law enforcement have the school mapped and we have made plans with those and other agencies if we have that emergency.

Question: How much do you communicate with Ballard High School?

Answer: We have radios that connect and a shared security protocol. The high school is in close communication with us. We get a notice if they go on lockdown, we do, too. We have coordinated lockdown and evacuation procedures.

General Comments

Comment: It sounds like for SPS and our school this issue is part of a national issue. For people here, there are lots you can do about guns over and above what's happening in your school. Remind parents to secure their guns and ask at playdates.

Response from Neil: Every year we have kids that have problems and depression. Every one of us has the capacity for good and bad choices. We can do things to help children deal with depression and anger. We believe in therapy and the services our counselors provide. The value we gain by letting kids feel that this is their school is really important. When I see kids here at night, I ask about what they are doing. When I hear that someone is looking for their lunchbox or coats before a weekend or holiday, I'm so glad they have that ability.

Comment: Parent had experienced her own middle and high school with high security environment. This environment did not lead to trust with administration and teachers for her as a student. She appreciates open environment here.

Comment: Security and facilities are easy to solve. Getting to know the community and building support for students is harder. We all can know the names of all children in our child's class. We can get to know the parents and know who is being excluded or bullied and stay connected to what's happening. Being present in the hallways as a parent is important and let's children know that they have caring adults that they can ask for help when needed. It also allows us all to monitor what is happening and support kind, safe, and responsible behavior.